

## Birth notification agreement reached with Community Health

### Information system will match new births to FIA database

An agreement between two state agencies will link information on new births in abusive families to state child abuse investigators. The new process will alert the Family Independence Agency to births in families where children have been previously removed for abuse or neglect reasons and parental rights have been terminated.

On Sept. 22 FIA director Douglas E. Howard announced a partnership with the Department of Community Health to match information on the FIA's Services Worker Support System with vital statistics at

the Department of Community Health.

"This issue was first brought to our attention by the Office of the Children's Ombudsman in a recent annual report," said Howard. "A recent death and a serious injury to another child caused us to escalate our efforts."

Howard said the new identification procedure would settle a troubling issue for FIA workers. "Michigan law requires our agency to do an assessment of risk to newborn children in homes where abuse has

*continued on page 19*

## EBT expanded to seven new counties in October

### Cash assistance benefits delivered electronically in new counties

LANSING—FIA director Douglas E. Howard announced expanded use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) for public assistance and food stamps customers in Barry, Eaton, Ingham, Calhoun, Branch, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties.

Effective Oct. 1, Family Independence Agency customers in these seven counties began accessing benefits using a plastic card called the Michigan Bridge Card to electronically obtain and expend their benefits. Cash benefits can be expended through enrolled retailers and obtained from automated teller machines, and food benefits can be redeemed at federally authorized food stamp retailers.

"EBT has succeeded at cutting costs, modernizing services and complementing Michigan's leadership position in human services delivery," said Howard Oct. 2. "It is a process that will end the use of food stamp coupons and deliver public assistance funds electronically."

Earlier this year the Family Independence Agency successfully piloted EBT in Jackson County. The EBT rollout will be phased in by periodically adding counties until the

*continued on page 18*

## FIA Icon for November-December 2000

### In this issue

Intercepted letters .....	page 2
From the director .....	page 3
Lake County woman is 82nd Achiever of the Month .....	page 4
Fatherhood Day at the Silverdome .....	page 6
November is Adoption Awareness Month .....	page 7
October was Child Support Month .....	page 7
FIA and Domestic Violence Board get Pioneer Award .....	page 8
Domestic violence task force initiated .....	page 8
Big Ten food stamp conference makes the grade .....	page 9
Brainstorming for food stamp payment accuracy .....	page 10
FIA provides food stamp leadership of another kind .....	page 12
State awards grants for before & after school programs .....	page 12
FIA represented at Sidney Olympics .....	page 13
Why wait for awareness week in September? .....	page 14
Employment processes changing in state government .....	page 15
Project Zero goes statewide, 78th site hits zero .....	page 16
Statewide deaf training for law enforcement .....	page 17
Savings Bonds payroll deduction .....	page 18
Viva for VIVA program in Delta County .....	page 19
\$5.2 million in grants awarded to 42 counties .....	page 20

# Intercepted letters

**To:** Kenneth DesArmo, director  
Mackinac County FIA

**Date:** Oct. 19

**Subj:** Close encounters of the positive kind

During a stop at a rest area Oct. 18, I met a Mackinac County woman who asked me what department I worked for, having seen me in the state car. I told her FIA Central Office, but my work responsibilities are for the northern third of the Lower Peninsula so I travel a lot. She told me she had contact with protective services. She said it had been a very difficult situation but CPS really worked with her and for her kids. She was now going to have full custody of her kids and their father was to have supervised visitation. She said it was hard because he was in another state, and that she and her children are working with preventive services and finding that helpful. She told me I shouldn't pay attention to all the bad things that people say about CPS. "You guys do good things," she said. She said she was going home to her kids to give them big hugs and tell them how much she loved them. It was super to hear from a complete stranger about the great work done for her and her children. You and your staff should be proud.

*Shelley Miller-O'Neill*

**To:** FIA director Douglas Howard

**Date:** Oct. 16

**Subj:** Monroe County FIA

I am writing to you about your Monroe County office. I have worked at The Salvation Army for 15 years. My job there as caseworker consists of daily contact with the workers at FIA. We do networking in order to help clients the best way we can. During those 15 years I have always had the complete cooperation, courtesy and respect from every worker at FIA. They are a great bunch of people who have shown caring and compassion for all people. I have also found that supervision in every department to be the same level of professionalism. I feel the Monroe County FIA office deserves a great round of applause. These people make your job easier and should make you proud. In 15 years I have had nothing but praise for your office in Monroe County.

*Joyce Poupard*

**To:** Robert Porter, director  
Grand Traverse County FIA

**Date:** Oct. 1

**Subj:** Thanks

I wanted to extend my gratitude for everything FIA has done for me this year. In case you haven't looked up my case, I applied for disability back in April 2000 for fibromyalgia and psoriatic arthritis. I had been told by doctors who had not been able to diagnose my condition prior to this that I was not experiencing the pain that I was feeling. I felt quite alone. I decided to find a doctor that would listen and actually run some tests. Low and behold there was the psoriatic arthritis and fibromyalgia. Then came the "angel", Lorraine Smith. She helped make this long arduous process seem almost simple, helped me focus on the positive outcome yet to arrive. Working with her helped me prepare a detailed, honest evaluation of my situation for the FIA judge and also the Social Security judge. I was approved for disability. She did an exceptional job working for me and helping my confidence concerning my case. I offer my sincerest gratitude.

*Leslie Wittkop*



## FIA Icon

*a publication of Michigan's  
Family Independence Agency*

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**Douglas E. Howard**, Director  
Family Independence Agency

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## ***From the Director***

***By Douglas E. Howard***

**Director, Family Independence Agency**

# **Teaming for Excellence**

Beginning in January 2001 you will be reading more in FIA Icon about the FIA strategic planning process, our agency mission and vision, and the way stories in this newsletter relate to those ongoing efforts. One part of this is an effort we call Teaming for Excellence.

The Family Independence Agency is a workplace that champions performance excellence and efficient and effective service delivery. I commend each employee who is strongly committed to providing excellent service. Efforts to develop and build on excellent service are regularly under way in our system, one being our "Customer Service Excellence" training program.

Together, we can build on the excellence that already exists in FIA and focus on proven quality management techniques. Teaming for Excellence is the vehicle that will transport these quality management principles and techniques statewide.

A design team to develop a Performance Excellence Plan in 1998 laid the foundation for this effort. Subsequently, a steering team that included representatives from management, union, workers and supervisors developed an implementation plan to foster performance excellence. The steering team changed the name to Teaming for Excellence in recognition of the importance of working in teams to solve problems and better serve our community.

As a conceptual framework for Teaming for Excellence, the design team identified and adopted the Malcolm Baldrige award criteria. Malcolm Baldrige is a former U. S. Commerce Secretary who studied businesses and determined that successful business exhibited certain characteristics. These criteria are proven management techniques used by successful organizations. As we move forward with quality processes, it is important to keep these seven principles in mind:

- Leadership.
- Strategic planning.
- Customer focus.
- Information and analysis.
- Human resource development.
- Process management.
- Performance results.

Every day I serve in this job I am proud to be working with all of you as the FIA team shows our customers what excellence is all about. Together I know we are up to the challenge.



# Lake County woman overcomes barriers to become 82nd recipient of FIA Achiever of the Month award

By Terry Luxford, Project Zero Coordinator  
Lake County Family Independence Agency, Baldwin  
Telephone (231) 845-2335

BALDWIN—A Lake County woman who overcame barriers to her health, work and domestic relationship was crowned Achiever of the Month for August 2000.

Bobbie Davidson was presented the Family Independence Agency's Achiever of the Month award for August during an Aug. 25 ceremony held at the Lake County Family Independence Agency office in Baldwin. She received the award in front of her friends, family, loved ones and members of the staff of the Family Independence Agency.

## Starting over after divorce

Bobbie applied for services through the FIA in 1993, after a divorce left her and her children without financial support. As a partial way to cope, Bobbie moved from populous, urban Kent County to rural

Lake County in 1997 to find a more personal and less stressful way of life for she and her two children. Bobbie had many personal barriers to overcome including the reading disorder

is motivated, knows her shortcomings and is working toward her goals."

During her program Aug. 25, FIA director Douglas E. Howard commended Bobbie for her hard

work and spirit. "The success here today is first and foremost Bobbie's," Howard said.

During her celebration Bobbie said her two children—Steven, age 11, and Kathryn, 8—are very important to her and her leading motivator. Adding to Bobbie's barriers, her son has been diagnosed as having dyslexia. Bobbie is seeking help so he will not go through her bad experiences and

get the schooling and training that he needs so that he will be able to read.

Bobbie said her mother, who died in November 1999, was her greatest inspiration. Bobbie said her mother had always told her, "You can



**Achiever of the Month Bobbie Davidson (inset and left) got help from children Steven, age 11, and Kathryn, age 8, and from her "special friend" pictured left, who helped her get to work and school, and was instrumental in her increased self-confidence.**

dyslexia, physical limitations, low math skills and low self-esteem. In spite of these barriers, Bobbie was determined to help herself and her family. As someone said about Bobbie, "She knows what she wants,



## To Strengthen Michigan Families

### Achiever of the Month



do anything you set your mind to.”

Bobbie’s motivation and determination made it easier for a team of staff to help her realize her goals for independence. The team made up of staff from the Lake County FIA, Michigan Works West Central, Michigan Human Resources Development Inc. (HRDI, a Work First provider) and Michigan Department of Career Development Rehabilitation Services.

Because of her dyslexia, Bobbie applied for Supplemental Security Income. While her application was in process, she was referred to MCDC Rehabilitation Services. Bobbie said her counselor, Joyce Ryan, “Has been like a mother to me...always supportive and encouraging.” Ryan helped Bobbie sign up for classes at West Shore Community College where she completed math, reading improvement and introduction to computers.

When her SSI application was denied in 1999, she was referred to Work First. Alice Smith, Bobbie’s caseworker at Lake County FIA, and Donna Young, an employment training specialist from HRDI, helped Bobbie find a job at Burger King.

“My job is perfect for me,” Bobbie said. “I love the work and would like to work toward a manager’s position. The employees are friendly and supportive.”

#### Winning more awards

Bobbie has won a number of local awards with Burger King for learning new systems, working overtime, and completing her job duties at a high rate. Ben Fritcher, the manager of Burger King in Ludington, commended Bobbie for her motivation and work ethic.

“Bobbie is always on time, has never missed a shift, is willing to fill in for other employees when they did not come in for their shifts and never sits around, she is always working,” Fritcher said.



**Lake County officials helped Bobbie Davidson celebrate, including (from left) Lake County FIA director Felix Younger, family independence specialist Alice Smith, and Joyce Ryan, Bobbie’s caseworker from MCDC Rehabilitation Services.**

In June 2000 Bobbie was awarded another monthly award when she was named Burger King’s employee of the month. “I am very pleased with Bobbie’s performance,” said Fritcher.

Bobbie always wanted to become a chef, in part because her father was a ship’s cook for 21 years and she loved to watch her father cook. To further her desire to be a chef she enrolled at West Shore C. C. to enhance her skills. When the time is right, she is planning to attend

culinary school. But she is looking to overcome other barriers in the meantime. For instance, Bobbie has never had a driver’s license, and now she is learning to drive.

#### Love and support noted

During her celebration, Bobbie thanked a number of individuals for their help in making her successful. She said when she went to Burger King, she didn’t think she would get the job but the managers at the restaurant looked beyond her physical disabilities and hired her.

“All the workers at Burger King helped me out,” she said. She gave special thanks to her children and close friend for their support.

She acknowledged help from her children and special friend, who drives back and forth to school and work from Idlewild to Ludington, about 40 miles one way. He helped her gain confidence and improve her self-esteem by being

supportive and always willing to help her. When she was taking classes, he always reminded her she was not alone and even helped her with her math when she had difficulties.

“I wanted to be successful so my family could be successful,” she said, “so the difficulty I had with reading and writing will not happen to my children.”

■ **Lake County FIA family independence manager Christine Thurber contributed to this story.**

# Fatherhood Day at the Silverdome

**"Fatherhood is Child's Play" featured during Lions' win over Green Bay**

By Eileen Schrauben

FIA Office of Child Support, Lansing

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For the sixth consecutive year, the Detroit Lions teamed up with the Family Independence Agency Office of Child Support to launch a statewide fatherhood campaign. This year's campaign, **Fatherhood is Child's Play**, focuses on increasing the involvement of fathers (whether married, divorced or single) in their children's lives—part of being a father includes spending time and playing with your children.

Beginning in October, which Gov. Engler designated as "Child Support Month" in Michigan, the fatherhood campaign will be promoted through radio and television public service announcements, billboards, newspaper ads, posters, and calendars. Promotional items will feature the players and their children and will be distributed throughout the state.

Again this year, Lions' defensive linemen Luther Elliss and Robert Porcher are the campaign spokesmen. Luther is featured in *Huddle Up* with



**Celebrating Fatherhood Day at the Silverdome (from left): Eldridge Mason and son Adrian; Durrell Robinson with children Zakiya and Khalif; FIA deputy director Mark Jasonowicz; Luther Elliss and Robert Porcher of the Detroit Lions; Ron Bown of the Wayne County Fatherhood Collaboration; William Phillips and son Ryan. Picture courtesy Tom Albert Photo**

his children Kaden, Olivia, Christian, and Isaiah. Robert is featured in *My MVPs* with his children Morgan, and Robert IV. The Porchers are expecting their third child at the end of the year.

The program was highlighted at halftime of the Oct. 8 Lions game versus Green Bay and a story about the campaign was included in that day's stadium edition of *NFL Insider* magazine.

The Family Independence Agency is proud of Robert and Luther and their dedication to showing the importance of family and proud that the campaign has had tangible results. To show this

occupied and happy during the photo shoot.

This year several fathers and their children had the opportunity to personally meet Robert and Luther. These fathers have sought the assistance of several fatherhood agencies and were subsequently identified for participation in this event. Various fatherhood agencies in Wayne County are members of the Wayne County Fatherhood Collaboration.

Eldridge Mason with his son Adrian of Southfield and William Phillips with his son Ryan of Saginaw have been provided with education,

appreciation, Mark Jasonowicz presented Elliss, Porcher and the Detroit Lions organization each with a plaque commemorating their involvement. Flowers were presented to Kim Porcher and Rebecca Elliss, each a wife and mother and instrumental in keeping their children

*continues next page*

# November is Adoption Awareness Month

Gov. Engler declared November Adoption Awareness Month in Michigan, a time to reward the important work done by adoptive families and help citizens understand the needs of children waiting for adoptive families. "Michigan is a national leader in public sector adoption services," said Governor Engler. "In 1999 Michigan's public and private contract adoption agencies set a new state record with 2,417 finalized adoptions."

Engler said about 600 Michigan state wards still do not have identified adoptive homes. They are identified on the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) network. "For these children adoption will provide the permanent loving family they need to grow up healthy, happy and well-adjusted."

FIA director Douglas Howard said they are 'special needs' children who meet one of four criteria: the child is older, not the infant often idealized as the perfect adoptive child; they are part of a sibling group needing adoptive placement together in a home; the child has a physical or mental disability; and/or the child is of minority birthright—African American, Native American or Hispanic.

Parents considering adoption should know adoption laws and services have changed significantly over the last 30 years, Howard said. "You don't have to be married, childless, rich, or own a house to adopt," he said. "You have to have a big heart, provide a stable, loving home and be able to help your adoptive child work through issues raised by their past history of abuse or neglect. In other words, you have to be a hero to these children."

■ For more information consult the FIA website: [www.mfia.state.mi.us](http://www.mfia.state.mi.us) or the MARE website: [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org)

## October was Child Support Month

Gov. Engler declared October Child Support Month in Michigan, a time to take stock of the essential elements of parenting — love, time, commitment and responsibility. "Child support is about personal responsibility — putting children first and supporting families," said Engler Oct. 11. "It is about the emotional and financial support parents provide for their children."

Engler said Michigan helps collect more than \$1 billion annually in outstanding child support through the FIA but more needs to be done. Paternity establishment is crucial to long-term emotional and financial stability for a child, said FIA director Douglas E. Howard.

"The easiest way to ensure a child grows up in poverty is for the child to be born to a single parent household," he said. "The second easiest way for a child to grow up in poverty is when the noncustodial parent fails to provide legally-mandated financial support."

## Fatherhood Day at Silverdome

*continued from page 6*

counseling and peer support services from the DADS of Michigan program. Durrell Robinson and his sons Zakiya and Khalif are involved with one of the Head Start programs sponsored by the Downriver Guidance Clinic. The fathers and children enjoyed the opportunity to play on the Lions football field, have photographs taken with Robert and Luther and get autographs. Several fathers, their children and/or families spent time together attending the Oct. 8 Green Bay Packers game, compliments of Luther Elliss.

The fatherhood campaign goal is to convey to people the importance of family life and to encourage fathers—whether married, divorced or single—to become involved in their children's lives. Our fatherhood campaign with the Detroit Lions—the first of its kind in the nation in 1995—has received two Emmy Awards (1997 and 1999) for the public service announcements and has been copied by many other NFL and professional sports teams and their states. It has proven to be a popular and effective tool to promote the message of responsible fatherhood and developing family ties between fathers and children.

In June 2000, Porcher was feted as a "Father of the Year" by the National Fatherhood Initiative. The national group cited Porcher for his involvement in numerous charitable causes, his involvement with our fatherhood campaign, and his presentations to father's groups. His consistent message to fathers is it is as important to spend time with their children as it is to provide for the families financially. Porcher shared the national award title with: Joseph Jones Jr., founder of the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development in Baltimore; former Buffalo Bills quarterback Jim Kelly, who with his wife founded Hunter's Hope Foundation, a group dedicated to increased awareness of Krabbe disease; and country singer Tim McGraw—son of former New York Mets pitcher "Tug" McGraw—whose marriage to and family life with Faith Hill establishes him as a role model in the entertainment industry.



# FIA and Domestic Violence Board get Pioneer Award

## Agency and board win for domestic violence-Families First Collaboration

Information: Debi Cain

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The FIA and Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board were recently honored for their combined efforts on the Families First-Domestic Violence collaboration.

The FIA and Domestic Violence Board were co-recipients of the Pioneer Award, presented by the National Family Violence Prevention Fund.

The award was presented at the first annual summit, "Effective Interventions, Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment", held in Jackson Hole, Wyo. in September. The conference, convened by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, brought together over 300 leaders in child welfare, domestic violence and the courts.

"The Family Independence Agency is a model for other states and local jurisdictions in bringing child welfare and domestic violence together to provide effective and respectful services that both promote child safety and the safety of battered mothers," said Janet Carter from the National Family Violence Prevention Fund. "This collaboration has been a creative and pioneering effort."

Accepting the award on behalf of the FIA and Domestic Violence Board were: Martha Tjhin, manager of the Families First program; Debi Cain, executive director of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board; and Judge Richard Halloran, a member of the Domestic Violence Board.

"I am proud to manage a program which has helped over 1,500 battered women and their children find hope and safe solutions," said Tjhin.

In addition, the Domestic Violence Board cited Jan Findlater, a law professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, for providing crucial

leadership that resulted in the effective collaboration.

"Helping families affected by domestic violence find solutions that will be safe and effective requires a strong commitment to, and investment in, a coordinated community response," said Findlater. "All of us need to be at the table bringing our expertise and resources."

The Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board was established by Public Act 389 of 1978 to

provide for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence. The board consists of seven members appointed by the governor and is administratively attached to the Family Independence Agency.

The Pioneer Award, an attractive clear glass award on a wood base, will be displayed in the Grand Tower Building in Lansing, home of the Domestic Violence Board and Family Independence Agency administrative office.

## DV homicide task force initiated

In a continued effort to eliminate deaths related to domestic violence, Gov. John Engler appointed a Domestic Violence Homicide Prevention Task Force Oct. 11. The task force will be chaired by Lt. Governor Dick Posthumus. It is a collaborative effort between such organizations as the Family Independence Agency, the Department of Community Health, the Michigan Women's Commission, the Domestic Violence Treatment and Prevention Board and the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

"Last year there were 31 domestic violence related homicides. One of the responsibilities of the task force will be to explore the possibility of establishing a State Death Review Team where individual cases of domestic violence deaths occurred," said Engler. "For the last 10 years Michigan has been a progressive force in the battle against domestic violence. As of today, we are one step closer to winning that battle."

As task force chair, Posthumus will continue the crusade against domestic violence that he took up nearly 10 years ago. "As the former Senate Majority Leader, I had the privilege of working on and approving much of the legislation that passed in recent years to stop domestic violence and strengthen penalties for abusers," Posthumus said. "Still, more needs to be done. We need to continue working toward eliminating the presence of domestic violence incidents in Michigan."

For the next six months the task force will meet regularly to determine what strategies, practices, policies, and actions should be taken to ultimately eliminate the occurrence of domestic violence homicides in the State of Michigan. At the end of the six-month period, a report of their findings, with a suggested course of action, will be presented to the governor.

For more information consult these agency websites: Department of Community Health ([www.mdch.state.mi.us](http://www.mdch.state.mi.us)); Michigan Women's Commission ([www.mdcrc.com/mwc/](http://www.mdcrc.com/mwc/)); Violence Against Women Office ([www.ojp.usdoj.gov/wawo/](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/wawo/)) and FIA([www.mifa.state.mi.us](http://www.mifa.state.mi.us)).



# Big Ten food stamp conference makes the grade

**FIA-hosted event grades out well by participants, federal government**

By Gene Hashley, Director  
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Wayne County FIA, Detroit  
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Even though months have passed since the Big Ten Food Stamp Program improvement conference, people are still talking about "PaymentAccuracy.com".

The event, held Aug. 16-18 in Dearborn, was a regional meeting including representatives from most "Big Ten" states and those from the federal food stamp agency. The conference was held to share innovative payment accuracy ideas and best practices to reduce food stamp program errors and increase customer service.

FIA director Doug Howard received a letter from Theodore Bell, regional administrator for U. S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service.

"As you must have surmised, the year 2000 conference was the best yet, a reflection of the creativity, initiative and hard work of Michigan Family Independence Agency staff and the BIG TEN steering committee," Bell said.

"Michigan staff created a website, designed attractive logos and visuals, planned off-site workshops, created engaging videos, and enthusiastically welcomed 550 staff from around the country."

Bell's letter of support mirrored responses from conference attendees, who addressed their observations with post-conference evaluations. There were 237 conference evaluation forms turned in by attendees, 116 that rated the conference exceptional, 96 very good, and 18 said it was good. No evaluations ranked the conference marginal or poor. The three most popular conference workshops were: Adventures in



**During the conference, staff from Berrien County FIA (above) and the Wayne County FIA Fullerton district office received Big Ten Special Achievement awards from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service for their excellent administration of the Food Stamp Program.**



Attitude, conducted by Mary Doze from Texas; Interviewing with Style with Tim Gard, always a conference favorite; and the Motown Agency Visit, an off-site visit to two of Wayne County's local offices, Greenfield-Joy and Tireman. Those who attended consistently gave high scores to these three.

By all accounts, PaymentAccuracy.com will go down

in history as one of the best, one Ohio will try to top next year when Cleveland is the conference site. Bell spoke for most when he concluded his letter to Howard by saying:

"Michigan can be justifiably proud that it has hosted a milestone event that has generated a great deal of talk and enthusiasm, while raising the benchmark for success in running a Big Ten conference."

# Brainstorming for food stamp payment accuracy

## FIA Zone office presents conference on way to reduce errors, increase customer service

By Rita Riddle

Acting Zone 4 AP Specialist, Lansing

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In an effort to improve food stamp payment accuracy, Zone 4 sponsored a one-day workshop Oct. 2 at the Comstock Inn in Owosso. The program, called "Brainstorming for Food Stamp Payment Accuracy", was presented to 83 first and second line family independence managers from Zones 2, 3 and 4.

Janet Burch, Zone 4 manager for the FIA, gave the opening remarks. She invited managers to review the options presented that day and explore other new initiatives. Presenters came from most counties in Zone 4 to share with colleagues ideas they said worked for them.

### Bay County

Jim Myers, a family independence manager (FIM) from Bay County, reviewed their experience using "Project Recall" in 1999 and again during this past summer. He said 46 of 48 staff persons completed the project in Bay County. Each participating staff member had to make 20 contacts with food stamp customers and hand-tabulate the responses. Myers said the specialists chose the customers that were contacted during Project Recall.

### Lapeer County

Sue Griffith reviewed their efforts to reduce unreported changes. Each family independence specialist (FIS) and eligibility specialist (ES) contacted at least five food stamp customers, reviewed current case file information and asked them to give



**Doug Williams, Sandi Mose and Barb Anders from Genesee County**

any changes. The county will tabulate results after the quarter and make a decision whether to make this an ongoing project.

Section manager Jerry Redman discussed a proposal similar to the CPS peer review plan that will help assess the local office's operations in administering the food stamp program. Through case reading and watching staff work, a new administrative tool will be developed to help FIS and ES obtain information on interviewing skills, preparation techniques, evaluate workspace for handling, filing, mail messages and ways to clarify conflicting information.

In addition, FIM will be assisted with individual staff conferences, case reading, assessing training needs and follow-up corrective action. Another component will be surveying customers to determine their understanding of reporting requirements and evaluate their ability to reach a case manager to report changes. The amount of time needed to complete the new administrative tool and program design is unknown.



**Cherri Hickmon and Joan Wagner from Berrien County**

### Genesee County FIA

Deputy director Doug Williams provided an overview of their "Director's Error Review Process" and outcomes. It is an intensive assessment with many staff at every level involved in reviewing errors from quality control audits. Sandi Mose, a financial program analyst, gave an overview of the "District Call Back Project" that was completed in the north district office of Genesee County.

Administrative support made telephone calls with three attempts per case at various times of the day trying to reach the customer.

Written notes on each call are forwarded to the specialist.

Barbara Anders, a FIM, discussed activities of the Technical Error Reduction Team, a mini-Technical Assistance Team. She discussed the case review, case



**Gary Miller**



corrections and call back processes and some of the training packages they have developed. Sandi Mose developed a spreadsheet for recording their audit results. She will share this with anyone via e-mail.

A new initiative called the "Customer Service Pilot Project" uses two staff in the lobby—either a FIS or ES and an administrative support clerk—who have access to a personal computer and are available to customers to answer questions and give specific information about their eligibility. Specialists will rotate and average three days per year in the lobby. The FIS or ES on duty are protected from telephone calls and appointments.

#### **Berrien County**

Section managers Cherri Hickmon and Joan Wagner presented "Project Recall", which is based on requesting information from a customer. They have developed a whole process surrounding "Project Recall" with a specific script and measurements. If the customer does not respond to the request, their case is put into closure, since the customer failed to report a change or changes that may effect their eligibility.

#### **Technical Assistance Teams**

Sonya Groulx, a FIM who with Alan Sage manages one of two Outstate Technical Assistance Teams, discussed team activities. Last year they completed case reads in Genesee, Oakland and Washtenaw counties and will reread cases at Genesee County. The teams do case reviews, case corrections, answer

questions asked by managers and specialists, and provide workload management consultation and mentoring processes.

The teams created training packages on the most error-prone areas—shelter, group composition and prospective budgeting, earned and unearned income, and application processing. They have made desk aids on these and are in the process of completing one on workload management. The teams can provide process-mapping services to a local office if requested. There is a Technical Assistance Team in Wayne County.

Christine Thurber, a FIM from Lake County, shared a video



**Jim Myers from Bay County, Sue Griffith and Gerald Redmon from Lapeer County**

she received from Indiana, one of the states who participated in the Big Ten food stamp conference. The seven-minute video runs in the lobby office in the Hoosier State to remind customers to report changes.

Gary Miller, the FIA's payment accuracy specialist, said major changes in the Food Stamp Program may unfold as reauthorization is on the horizon. Program access, customer service and accountability remain highly visible on the food stamp radar screen.

"We may see policy simplification regarding budgeting for the

working poor, longer certification periods, reporting changes and required verifications," he said. "Time will tell."

Miller congratulated field staff for our recent payment accuracy improvement, saying, "Keep on Truckin'!"

The workshop concluded with an open forum identifying problems and ways to improve food stamp payment accuracy. Some of the suggestions included:

- Develop an automated recall notice at case opening to reinforce reporting responsibilities and find out about changes not reported by clients. The notice would be mailed every 60-90 days asking if all information is the same.

- Development of an automated phone call system, similar to the catalog order system, that would contact customers when they are being mailed something that requires a response from them.

- Improved phone systems in local offices that tie into customer online data, so customer calls are identified by the system and their computerized information shows on the screen automatically.

- Succession planning – St. Clair County has a specialist who works with new staff transitioning specialists into home calls, reviews, interviews, and caseload.

- There was overwhelming support to end lifetime online case assignments to a single worker that causes a customer to wait a long time



**Christine Thurber**

*continues on page 12*



# FIA provides food stamp leadership of another kind

## Hall speaks to food stamp protesters, wins over crowd at national event

ST. LOUIS, Mo.—Michigan provided leadership of another kind at a national food stamp meeting held in the Archway to the West in September.

During the state food stamp director's conference held Sept. 17-20, a group of protesters gathered at St. Louis' downtown Adam's Mark Hotel to help set the agenda for the conference. The group of about 80 marched on the event demanding a more accessible program.

The protest group called ROWEL, or the Reform Organization for Welfare, represents food stamp customers and advocates from a half-dozen states.

"We are here representing the people at the bottom of the barrel who have no voice and the poor across the nation who have been trampled by bureaucrats," said T. C. Calvert of Texas in a St. Louis newspaper story.

Sue Hall, director of the Food Stamp Program for the FIA and president of the state food stamp director's association, became the focal point of the protest.

"Sue knew in advance this advocate protest would be held on the first day of the conference," said Gary Miller of FIA. "What none of us expected was the group would rally inside the hotel while conferees were registering, demanding to meet with Sue. The hotel came alive with the protesters."

Through Roz King of the American Public Human Services Association, Hall invited the group's leaders to a separate room for a discussion with her and Larry Goolsby of APHSA.

The ROWEL protest called for making the food stamp program more customer-friendly by using innovation and new approaches.

Their specific ideas included using mail-in applications, adding Saturday and evening hours, training caseworkers on customer sensitivity and posting a food stamp program "bill of rights" in every office.

"They left with the understanding that there are many areas of agreement between the two groups about the current complexity of the Food Stamp Program and its effect on customer households," said Hall. "Our aim is to offer solutions to the federal government for a program in desperate need of change," she said in a St. Louis Post-Dispatch story the next day.

"Over the years, it has been layered with complexities, many of which have done nothing to help the needy. What we have now is a burdensome system both for those in need and also for those who administer the program."

## Brainstorming

*continued from page 11*

because of several reasons: that specialist denied their application previously; their case was last active with that specialist; and/or that specialist is not available that day.

■ FIMs requested videos with policy releases and the same policy training that their staff received during Hot Potatoes.

■ Share an orientation on food stamp payment accuracy with administrative support and services staff.

On Nov. 28, Zone 4 and Berrien County FIA will co-sponsor a site visit to Berrien County. Ten FIM, two AP specialists and the Zone 4 manager will visit. They will review processes used to reach their current food stamp rate of 4.81 percent.

## State awards grants for school programs in 8 counties

### Effort intended to reduce teen pregnancy, violence and encourage citizenship

LANSING—Gov. Engler announced grants totaling nearly \$16 million to communities for new services in eight counties for children in kindergarten through ninth grade. "These programs are aimed at preventing teen pregnancy, reducing violence and gang membership and other areas where we can impact youngsters early in life," said Engler Sept. 22.

"Programs selected for funding will incorporate parental involvement into their services," said FIA director Doug Howard.

Howard said each funded project must include a minimum of three of the following topics: pregnancy prevention; chemical abuse and dependency including non-medical services; gang violence prevention; academic assistance including assistance with reading and writing; preparation toward future self-sufficiency; leadership development; case management or mentoring; and anger management.

For more information see this news release on the FIA website, [www.mfia.state.mi.us](http://www.mfia.state.mi.us), under "Governor Engler's Releases Related to the FIA".

# FIA represented at Sidney Olympics

## Ionia Montcalm FIA staff participate in athletic events

By Terry King and Bev Vining, Olympics co-chairs  
Telephone (517) 831-8412

STANTON—The Montcalm Family Independence Agency participated in the Olympics in Sidney recently. Actually, we are talking about the Montcalm Area Corporate Olympics, held Sept. 17-23 at the Montcalm Community College in Sidney, Michigan (that other Sydney has two Ys).

The games provided an opportunity for us to meet other professionals in a non-work environment and to build office esprit-de-corps, while enjoying athletic competition.

The Corporate Steering Committee, consisting of representatives from several hospitals and health providers, established the games to promote health and wellness to area employees and their families. 2000 was the first year FIA accepted the challenge to enter this weeklong competition.

There were nine teams entered: Carson Health Network, Mid-Michigan Health Department, Montcalm Community College, Chemical Bank, Goodwill Industries, United Memorial Hospital, Meijer, Inc., Stanton Family Chiropractic Center, and the Family Independence Agency.

The opening ceremonies held Sunday, Sept. 17 were incredible. After opening comments and a parade of entrants, VIPs raced on tricycles the length of the gym floor in several heats. We were proud to cheer our director, Phil Larson, on to a second place finish in a very competitive race.

Earlier that day, many golfers participated in a four-person scramble. The FIA golfers noted they

had the most fun of any team there. The bowling event was held earlier on Sunday as well. Other games throughout the week included volleyball, three-on-three basketball, a 5K run/walk, tee-shirt swim relay, inner tube relay, tug-of-war, and archery/shooting. The Montcalm FIA team took first place in archery/shooting to vault us into eighth place in the nine-team field.

Everyone who participated in the Montcalm Area Corporate Olympics thoroughly enjoyed it. Because this was our first year, we decided it would be a learning experience in preparation for next year's event.

We would encourage anyone who may be having similar Olympics in their area to get involved. It required some work and time, but it was a fun and worthwhile endeavor.

■ Terry King is Project Zero coordinator and Bev Vining is an information technology technician for Ionia Montcalm FIA.

**"Olympians"**  
Dennis Major  
(above), Phil  
Larson (inset)  
and Jamie  
Lovelace  
participated in  
the Sidney  
Olympics.



# Why wait for awareness week in September?

**Muskegon County celebrated diversity all year long beginning January 2000  
Events peaked during Affirmative Action Awareness Week**

By Gail Kraft

Muskegon County Family Independence Agency, Muskegon

Telephone (231) 733-3695

Many FIA offices celebrated diversity in the workplace and in their communities during Affirmative

Action Awareness Week Sept. 13-17. But Muskegon County FIA went beyond that, making 2000 its first Affirmative Action Awareness Year with celebrations every month.

After county offices were given the option to develop and hold local events, Muskegon County formed a committee in summer 1999. The group decided to hold activities over the year to educate and sensitize employees to the principles of affirmative action, equal opportunity and diversity.

The seven committee members—Cheryl Nebedum, Rosemary Reinhold, Anita Rosenberg, Linda Postmus, Lynda Balkema and Robin Brand—each chaired a subcommittee and oversaw the yearlong project. We called them the “AAA team”.

In addition to planning, publicizing and preparing for activities, they encouraged staff and shared ongoing information about community activities that supported the principles and objectives of affirmative action and equal opportunity. We are fortunate to live in a community where these principles are encouraged by a number of groups. One, Communities United for Peace, has as its mission being, “Dedicated to building a community in which racism, hate, prejudice, and their effects are eliminated.”

Prior to Affirmative Action Awareness Week, Muskegon County FIA director Janeane Morrissey sent a memo to all staff describing the manner in which our office would

## L. O. News is Good News

*The latest news from local offices.....*

FIELD OPERATIONS ADMINISTRATION / WAYNE COUNTY

observe events of the year. Later, another memo described our kickoff event and invited all to attend a breakfast at Muskegon Community College. There, keynote speaker Judge Gregg Pittman gave a moving account of how affirmative action personally affected him.

Every month of the new century was devoted to diversity awareness. January and February were dedicated to African American History and Pride Celebration, in time to celebrate February as African-American History Month. Activities to promote an increased understanding and commitment to equal opportunity for women were held in March and April 2000 including events celebrating Women's History Month.

For Disability Awareness in April, we were privileged to hear biographer Thomas Walz, emeritus professor of social work from the University of Iowa, chronicle the inspirational story of Bill Sackter. Bill was placed in a mental hospital at age 7 and institutionalized for the next 50 years. After he obtained freedom, he became a model citizen and his inspirational story of living independently with his disability became the subject of two movies in the 1980s. Prof. Walz befriended Sackter and described him as “a role model for all persons, able and disabled.”

To celebrate the richness of the Hispanic culture, two of our staff created a photo documentary of life on

a migrant farm, artistically displayed with Hispanic arts and crafts. The exhibit, currently

on display at the county museum, will later travel to the Muskegon Mall for a Hispanic Festival.

Asian American Awareness Month was held during June. Highlights of the month were the showing of “The Joy Luck Club” and a luncheon at the House of Chan. The Native American subcommittee hoped to have a local tribe hold a pow wow but the timing did not work out. Meanwhile, we distributed flyers on Native American women and on the “Legend of the Dream Catcher”.

There were many other events we shared throughout the year such as

- Taste of Ethnicity – ethnic foods at a city festival.

- A Celebration of Diversity – Muskegon FIA ethnic fashion show and potluck.

- Jacob Lawrence art exhibit at the Muskegon Art Museum.

- America's Day Celebration – a three-day alternative histories program celebrating history and culture of Latino, Hispanic, Native American and African Americans.

- Institute for Healing Racism held at Muskegon FIA—a ten-week institute held weekly two hours each week.

Our encore event was an October diversity workshop led by Lee Mun Wah open to all employees. A second event for all staff held Oct. 24 was a breakfast and speaker.

Subcommittees are now being formed to continue this new tradition in 2001. Call me for more information.



# Employment processes changing in state government

## Most job searches no longer begin with Civil Service testing

### Candidates now responsible to seek out vacancies in state government

By Judy Sieffert

FIA Office of Human Resources, Lansing

Telephone (517) 373-7667

In conjunction with the implementation of the Human Resource Management Network system (HRMN called herman), the Michigan Department of Civil Service is implementing changes in the application and selection process for filling job vacancies. The current selection methods of hiring, transferring and promoting state employees changed effective Oct. 1.

The most significant change from a candidate perspective is that interested persons must now seek out vacancies. In the former process, candidates for employment got their names on employment registers and they were contacted by prospective employers to determine their interest in vacancies. In the new vacancy driven process, candidates for employment must seek vacancies for which they can apply.

Within the FIA, we will be posting all vacancies on the FIA-Net Vacancy Posting System. It will be up to interested applicants to seek out the job opportunities, and take the appropriate steps as shown on the job postings, to indicate their interest in these vacancies. The FIA will also put vacancies on our public web page in the near future.

For the Civil Service-maintained applicant pools, FIA hiring managers will continue to contact applicants/employees and let them

know of the vacancies. In the other process, applicants/employees will need to be more proactive and seek out opportunities.

With the exception of seven exams and some specialty classifications, Civil Service is no longer testing applicants for state employment. These are the remaining examinations:

- Administrative Support Entry 5-9 - #5029 (computerized exam).
- Non Professional Supervisor - #9031.
- Law Enforcement Entry 7-12.
- State Police Sergeants E-12.
- Entry Level Security 8-E9.
- Corrections Non-Professional Supervisors 11-13.
- Corrections Resident Services 9-E10.

**In addition,** Civil Service will maintain applicant pools for Assistance Payments Worker (Eligibility Specialists) 8-11; Migrant

Program Worker 8-E10; Youth Specialists 7-E9; and Youth Specialist Supervisors 11.

There are no written

examinations for the classifications included in these examinations. Interested, qualified applicants will need to submit an application to Civil Service and they will review the applicant's education and experience to determine if they meet the specific requirements for the particular classification for which they are applying.

The specific process for applying for the remaining exams is defined on the various examination announcements. In most cases, applicants are required to submit an application and/or resume along with any other required documentation to the Department of Civil Service.

Additional information on the streamlined application process and how applicants may apply online can be found on the Civil Service website at <http://www.state.mi.us/mdcs>

With the implementation of the new process outlined above, it is critical that all employees understand they must take positive steps to identify their interest in state employment opportunities both within and outside of FIA.



# “0” still the magic number

## Project Zero expanded statewide in October 78<sup>th</sup> site reaches magic number

LANSING—When Ingham County Family Independence Agency kicked off its Project Zero program Oct. 31 at the Holiday Inn West, it concluded a four-year program to take an idea and turn it into a statewide success.

The final expansion of Project Zero took place in October, when the last 15 Michigan counties joined the state's landmark welfare reform project. The last counties to join were Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gratiot, Huron, Ingham, Isabella, Jackson, Lapeer, Macomb, Muskegon, Osceola, Saginaw, Tuscola, and Washtenaw.

Simultaneously, Project Zero sites around Michigan kept putting people to work in record numbers. Through the end of October, 78 of 104 Project Zero sites had reached “zero” at least one time. “Zero” is the point when all target Family Independence Program cases in a county or district are working and earning income.

“In state government we once believed moving people from welfare to work was one of our greatest dilemmas,” said Governor Engler. “Now through Project Zero, we know any community, regardless of its geographic location, distance to jobs, or the makeup of its people, can achieve the goal that everyone works and earns income.”

What began as a pilot program in six sites in 1996, was expanded to 12 sites in nine counties in its second year. In October of 1998, the project was expanded to 35 sites, and then to 49 counties and 70



**Four who celebrated: Local and state officials joined Project Zero customers and partner agency employees at kickoff events in October. Among the celebrants were (clockwise from upper left) Jackson County FIA director Renee Hayward; Gerald Schmiedicke, chair of the Clare County Social Services Board; Trenda Rusher, director of Washtenaw County Employment and Training Community Services; and Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus, who helped kick off a half-dozen new Project Zero programs.**

sites in October 1999. On Oct. 1 the last 15 counties joined the program. Around the state, FIA, local and state officials sang the praises of Project Zero and its positive effect on public assistance customers.

“My dad lost his job during the depression and for a time my grandmother received public assistance,” said Lieutenant Governor Dick Posthumus during the Project Zero kickoff in Jackson Oct. 20. “Project Zero is a way we can make a difference in the lives of individuals.”

Project Zero is a collaborative welfare reform program carried out through state and local partners. State

partners include the Family Independence Agency, Michigan departments of Career Development, Transportation, Community Health, and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. Locally, agencies such as Work First, Community Coordinated Child Care and many other agencies deliver important services to public assistance customers on their journey to employment and self-sufficiency.

“This is an important watershed for the FIA in Saginaw,” said Saginaw County FIA director Longino Gonzales at the kickoff in that county Oct. 13. “This program allows the entire community to work together toward a common goal.”

The goal of Project Zero is to reduce to zero nonworking Family Independence Program cases that have been open at least 60 days and are expected to work.

“The ultimate goal of Project Zero is to help people find a career and say goodbye to public assistance,” said Margarete Gravina from the welfare to work division of Michigan Department of Career Development during the Gratiot County kickoff Oct. 10.

Since the last report in FIA Icon, 13 more Project Zero sites reached zero for the first time including five serving Detroit neighborhoods. All tolled, 57 of 81 county offices and 21 of 23 Wayne

*continues on page 17*

# Statewide deaf training for law enforcement

## Program a response to recent shooting in Detroit

The FIA is involved in a new police training program to identify and work with people who are deaf. Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus and Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard announced an initiative Sept. 29 that will supplement other police training around Michigan. It happened after the shooting death of a deaf man in Detroit.

"Recently a deaf man was shot by a Detroit police officer," said FIA director Doug Howard. "Newspaper (accounts said) he was holding a rake as he approached four officers and was unable to hear them instructing him to drop it. Because the officers didn't know he was deaf, this tragic event resulted in the man's death."

All major law enforcement associations in Michigan have endorsed the statewide training initiative. Posthumus said the new initiative will help police better communicate and respond when encountering a deaf person—whether helping a victim who is deaf or taking a statement from a witness or suspect. "Our goal is to strengthen communication between the deaf community and law enforcement," said Posthumus. "The State Police have required deaf awareness training for their officers."

Chris Hunter, director of the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns' Division on Deafness, has personally seen the positive results of this training with the Michigan State Police. "When he was called to an accident scene involving his wife, he was greeted by a state police officer who used some basic sign language," said Howard. "The officer explained the situation and informed him that his wife was okay but was being taken to the hospital for a check up. The officer recognized Hunter and reminded him that he was in the training. The communication relationship between Hunter, a deaf person, and the police officer was very positive."

The Division on Deafness has provided two-hour "orientation to hearing loss" presentations to Michigan State Police recruits and some local police departments for over 15 years. The training has helped law enforcement officers more effectively communicate with deaf and hard of hearing persons. Each officer receives a finger-spelling card, pocket card with commonly used field signs and a list of telephone numbers for deaf interpreter referral centers.

In 1999, the Division on Deafness and Deaf Community Advocacy Network (Deaf CAN) of Waterford provided several training sessions for Oakland County law enforcement officers with great success. The Division on Deafness and Deaf CAN have been working with the Michigan State Police, state police associations and the governor's office on development of an automobile visor pocket card called "communication access needs". The card informs law enforcement officers of a person's hearing loss, rights to effective communication and how to communicate. When finalized the card will be distributed to deaf and hard of hearing people throughout Michigan. Howard said these initiatives are steps to ensure no more events like the one in Detroit.

"The incident resulted in tragic consequences but could have been prevented," he said. "The officers lacked training on how to respond to people with disabilities, especially those with a hearing loss. These efforts will ultimately result in better communication and increased safety for Michigan citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing as well as Michigan law enforcement officers." For more information or technical assistance contact the Division on Deafness toll free by phone at (877) 499-6232 TTY/voice; or by email at [dod@state.mi.us](mailto:dod@state.mi.us)

## Project Zero expanded statewide in October

### 78<sup>th</sup> site reaches magic number

*continued from page 16*

County districts have reached zero at least once since 1997. County and district offices reaching zero since mid-September (and the date they reached zero) and include: Iosco County (Sept. 22), Alcona County (Sept. 25), Wayne County Hamtramck and McNichols-Goddard districts (both Sept. 27), Wayne

County Schoolcraft district and Kalamazoo County (both Sept. 29), Montcalm County (Oct. 4) Roscommon County (Oct. 9), Huron, Keweenaw and Iron counties (all Oct. 11), Wayne County Greenfield-Joy district (Oct. 13) and Wayne County Highland Park district (Oct. 24).

"Project Zero is our road to discovery," said FIA director Howard at the Ingham County kickoff. "It's because of every one of you out there that it has succeeded," he said to FIA workers, community partners and cash assistance customers. "We can all be proud of our achievements, regardless of where we live."





## Savings Bond payroll deduction

November is U.S. Savings Bond month. Each year the U.S. Department of Treasury offers state employees an opportunity to purchase savings bonds through automatic payroll deduction. For more information, visit the U.S. Savings Bond website at [www.savingsbonds.gov](http://www.savingsbonds.gov) or see the special insert with your November 7 paycheck.

## EBT expanded to seven new counties in October

*continued from page 1*

process is statewide in July 2001.

“Michigan’s EBT program had a very successful pilot in Jackson County, where retailers and customers both reported relatively few problems with the transition,” said Howard. “It is a great step forward that provides greater privacy and dignity for public assistance customers. It means there are no more welfare checks to cash and no more food stamp coupons.”

Under EBT, cash assistance customers will use their “Bridge card” — a product similar to an ATM or debit card — to purchase goods and obtain cash benefits at enrolled retailers or ATMs. Most retailers who previously accepted federal food stamps are enrolled as

EBT retailers.

Each EBT cardholder has separate electronic accounts for federal food stamps and cash assistance, called the Family Independence Program (FIP). In August, there were 16,903 food stamp cases in the 7 counties serving 38,206 persons. Also that month there were 4,446 FIP cases serving 11,774 persons in those counties. Most FIP families also receive food stamps, meaning there is some duplication in the case numbers.

Michigan contracted with Citicorp Services Inc., the leading national provider of EBT services in the nation, to implement its program. They will maintain a 7-day, 24-hour customer service help line. The

customer service telephone number is 1-888-678-8914.

Customers will use the help line to report lost or stolen cards, select or change personal identification numbers, and to find stores that accept the Bridge card. In addition, EBT customers will receive written training or can choose to attend video training on using their new card.

“EBT has significant benefits for the business and retailer community,” said Engler. “The process will save time at checkout lanes, eliminate paperwork requirements and add security to economic transactions.”

Pending unforeseen developments, the Family Independence Agency anticipates expanding EBT statewide on the following schedule:

Start date	Counties	Total EBT counties
Nov. 1, 2000	Allegan, Van Buren, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Cass and Berrien	14
Feb. 1, 2001	Ottawa, Kent, Ionia, Clinton, Shiawassee, Gratiot, Montcalm, Muskegon, Oceana, Newaygo, Mecosta, Isabella, Midland, Gladwin, Clare, Osceola, Lake and Mason	32
March 1, 2001	Arenac, Bay, Saginaw, Tuscola, Huron, Sanilac, St. Clair, Lapeer and Genesee	41
April 1, 2001	Macomb, Oakland, Livingston, Washtenaw and Monroe	46
May 1, 2001	Wayne	47
June 1, 2001	Iosco, Ogemaw, Roscommon, Missaukee, Wexford, Manistee, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Crawford, Oscoda, Alcona, Alpena, Montmorency, Otsego, Antrim, Leelanau, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Emmet and Mackinac	69
July 1, 2001	Chippewa, Luce, Schoolcraft, Alger, Delta, Menominee, Marquette, Dickinson, Iron, Baraga, Houghton, Keweenaw, Ontonagon and Gogebic	83

# Viva for VIVA

## New Michigan Commission for the Blind program in Delta County

Earlier this year, Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) began a new program to provide information and referral to persons in Delta County over the age of 55 who may have a visual impairment. The VIVA Project (stands for visually impaired volunteer assistant) works with the retiree and senior volunteer programs through the Delta County Senior Citizens Centers.

"The VIVA project is doing very well," said Robert Utrup, independent living program manager for Michigan Commission for the Blind. "On Sept. 21 we had an additional VIVA training at the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians' Tribal Health Center. At that time independent living specialist Rose Dunlap-Gist and I conducted a three-hour in-service for the Tribal Eldercare Unit, and introduced the VIVA project to 19 home health aides and drivers. Tribal officials seemed very excited about the opportunity to become involved with the VIVA project. We're planning follow up training in November."

An area official said the project will connect with local efforts.

"This kind of innovative programming complements our Tribal health and elder strategic planning for 2000 and beyond," said Holly Kibble, director of eldercare services for the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians' Health & Human Services Center.

In the VIVA project, volunteers act as a conduit between the community and MCB, offering senior citizens in Delta County, who may have visual impairments, information about visual impairments and providing resources and referral to appropriate agencies.

"We plan on hiring someone

for the Eastern Upper Peninsula to share the caseload with Michael Welch," said Utrup. "This person would also be a link with the seven-county service area of the Chippewa Health Center.

"In addition to the Upper Peninsula activity, we are in the talking stages with the Michigan Lions about having VIVA become a part of their regular activity. That would be a significant gain through a statewide organization that reaches people with visual disabilities."

A nonprofit community-based organization, Lions Club International

chapters regularly provide glasses and other visual aids to people in their communities.

Michigan Commission for the Blind operates programs around Michigan for persons who are blind and have visual impairments. It is managed by commissioners appointed by the governor and is administered through the FIA.

■ **For more information about this or other programs offered by Michigan Commission for the Blind, call toll free (800) 292-4200. In Lansing please call 373-2062. Web users please consult the MCB website: [www.mcb1.org](http://www.mcb1.org)**

## Birth notification agreement reached between FIA, DCH

*continued from page 1*

occurred, even though we have no way of knowing the child was born," Howard said.

State law requires the FIA to do the assessment but there is no mechanism that automatically lets FIA know when such a birth occurs. After termination of parental rights, FIA no longer has a role with the family. The new process will help resolve this shortcoming common in many states.

"Our staff today must rely on parents self-reporting, on hospital personnel, other agency staff or members of the general public alerting them to the birth of a child to a family where other children have been permanently removed. That is not an acceptable approach in such a potentially volatile situation," Howard said.

Howard said the FIA queried a number of other state Child and Family Services agencies across the nation and found that none had an

automated system, and each faced the same problems in trying to identify these families.

Howard said he and state Department of Community Health director James K. Haveman have asked staff to finalize the new process that they expect will begin in the coming months.

"Combining our information systems will help us to identify children that may be at risk," said Department of Community Health Director, James K. Haveman, Jr. "This groundbreaking partnership will focus on the safety of the child and allow for early intervention when needed."

This new process will help identify births to families where the FIA or other agencies are not immediately aware of the prior serious protective services intervention. It will help workers follow up to determine any risk factors the newborn may face.

# \$5.2 million in grants awarded to 42 counties

## Project will serve families with children age newborn to three Multi-agency project to build stronger families

Michigan awarded 42 new grants totaling \$5.2 million to communities to provide support services for families with young children. The grants, announced Sept. 25, are part of a comprehensive service coordination initiative with special emphasis on prevention jointly administered by the FIA, Michigan Departments of Community Health and Education, the Children's Trust Fund and local multi-purpose collaborative bodies.

"These grants will help prevent child abuse and neglect by promoting prevention and strong nurturing families," Gov. Engler said. "This funding is significant because nothing is more important than the safety of Michigan's children."

Families served by the program are those with children from birth to age 3 who have drug-exposed and low birth weight infants; children with developmental delays; parents with learning disabilities or serious mental disturbances; teen parents; homeless families; and families living in unsafe environments. The programs will begin October 1 and operate for up to three years.

Programs selected for funding will help foster positive parenting skills, increase school readiness, promote access to community services and increase local capacity to serve at-risk families. Some programs will support healthy family environments by discouraging alcohol, tobacco and substance abuse. The grants are part of a \$8.75 million appropriation and designated for community-based prevention. Allocations are contingent on legislative appropriations and available revenue. Criteria for selection included communities with higher than average rates of infant mortality, poverty, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy and adult substance abuse.

■ A complete list of the grantees, grant amounts, contact persons and intended uses can be viewed by reading this news release on the FIA website: [www.mfia.state.mi.us](http://www.mfia.state.mi.us) and going to "Governor Engler's Releases Related to the FIA".

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